

**Intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop
an international legally binding instrument on plastic
pollution, including in the marine environment
Fifth session**

Busan, 25 November -1 December 2024

ITEM 1: OPENING OF THE SESSION

(25 November, 10.00 h)

Your Excellency, Mr. Yoon Suk Yeol, President of the
Republic of Korea,

Mr. Kim Wansup, Minister of Environment of the Republic of
Korea,

Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP

Ms. Jyoti Mathur-Philipp, Executive Secretary of the INC

Esteemed Ministers and delegates, representatives of the
observer delegations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning, and welcome to this pivotal gathering for our
planet, people, and shared future.

It is an honor to address such a distinguished assembly,
representing 178 nations, 30 international agencies, and 576
observer organizations from across the globe. A shared

mission unites us: to confront the global plastic pollution crisis.

Allow me to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to the President of the Republic of Korea for graciously hosting the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

The generosity of the Korean people and the inspiring maritime landscape surrounding us have set the optimal framework for us to work productively. Together, we aim to achieve what I dare to call a historic milestone.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, dear friends,

We are here today because plastic pollution is not just an unsightly nuisance but an urgent and insidious threat to ecosystems, economies, and human health.

The magnitude of the crisis is evident and underscores the urgency of our mission. Let me mention three facts that illustrate this:

- Without significant intervention, the amount of plastic entering the environment annually by 2040 is expected to nearly double compared to 2022.
- Plastics are highly durable. Depending on environmental conditions, they can decompose in 100 to 1,000 years or more.
- Microplastics have been detected in various human organs, raising concerns about potential health risks, including cancer and reproductive issues.

As we can see, this conference is about far more than drafting an international treaty. It is about humanity rising to meet an existential challenge. The decisions we make in the next nine days will shape history.

Let us work with precision and diligence, but always maintain sight of the urgency.

Pragmatism demands that we build bridges, finding unity amid our diverse perspectives. Urgency compels us to act with determination. The world is watching, and we must not falter.

This is a member-driven process. As representatives of nations, we hold the power to make this treaty a transformative tool to end plastic pollution—or to let this opportunity slip into history as an unfulfilled promise.

But we are not alone. Look around this room. Observers from environmental organizations, international agencies, the scientific community, academia, the private sector, civil society, and Indigenous peoples join us. Your expertise, evidence, ideas, and relentless advocacy enrich our work.

Your presence reminds us that this is not just a political negotiation but a collective effort transcending borders, sectors, and generations.

I am optimistic—not because I believe in miracles, but because I believe in the power of human action, hard work, and collective will.

We are not starting from scratch. Four previous meetings, supported by countless regional discussions and technical exchanges, have built a solid foundation.

Achieving a common understanding is possible, but it requires relentless effort, unwavering commitment, and bold political will.

We have eight days to face a multifaceted task, and two more days will be dedicated to plenary sessions at the end of our meeting. That leaves us little time to waste. We must remain focused on the mandate we set for ourselves at UNEA 5.2 and the moral responsibility entrusted to us.

Let us be candid: Differences remain on several issues. Yet, I ask whether anyone in this room has advocated for more plastic pollution or leniency in the face of this environmental crisis. No. On the contrary, there is universal acknowledgment that this is a problem we must solve together proactively.

The voices of the world are clear:

- We need healthy meals free from microplastics.
- We need clean air, oceans, and forests.
- We need safe, non-toxic plastic products.
- We need innovation, circularity, and collaboration to replace harmful plastics.

Let us harness every tool of multilateralism, every ounce of creativity, and every moment of dialogue to overcome our differences and craft a treaty as ambitious as our collective will allows.

We must fulfill the mandate of UNEA and respond to humanity's urgent call.

This is our moment—to act with courage, determination, and optimism. Together, we can end plastic pollution and leave a legacy of hope for our planet and future generations.

Thank you. Now, let us get to work.